



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 10 February 2010

MOTION

Sale of Public Assets; Call for Production of Documents

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

This House:

- notes that widespread public sentiment exists that the Bligh Labor Government concocted a plan to conduct a series of privatisations before the March 2009 election, but deliberately did not reveal those plans as part of its election strategy;
- notes that the Premier has selectively quoted from a Cabinet document from October 2008 which included a recommendation to sell a number of Government assets; and
- calls on the Premier to immediately table in the House a copy of the Cabinet submission, notes of the meeting where the submission was tabled and discussed, and the minutes of the meeting where a decision on the submission was made.

This debate is about trust. The people of Queensland do not trust Labor; they do not trust the Premier, the member for South Brisbane, and neither should they. The reason Queenslanders do not trust Anna Bligh and the Labor Party is because before the last election when the government knew that the worst ravages of the financial global financial crisis were on their way to our shores it started taking advice from Treasury on the likely effects of the global financial crisis and what would be required to happen in response.

We need to look at what was happening in late 2008. The Queensland budget was in meltdown, the midyear fiscal and economic review was to be released in December with a downgrading of the budget bottom line from an \$800 million surplus to a \$54 million surplus. Of course, the 2007-08 final result was soon to be announced as a \$1 billion loss for the year. By February 2009, some months after, when the economic and fiscal update was released on the eve of the election, the 2008-09 budget had gone from an \$800 million surplus to a \$54 million surplus to a \$1.5 billion deficit. Of course, that was later revised as well thanks to some budgetary measures. Treasury estimates changed it a number of times. That is another reason the people of Queensland have lost faith in this government in terms of budget projections and predictions that are changed month after month.

Over the forward estimates, according to the economic and fiscal update, Queensland was going to see about a \$12 billion deficit. There is no denying that at that point in time things looked bad and the government panicked. Panic was coming from all quarters. Kevin Rudd, the Prime Minister, writing in *The Monthly*, said capitalism was dead. So the government put together a final solution to deal with the out-of-control debt. We must not forget that \$64 billion of that debt was there before the global financial crisis. Obviously, according to the facts contained in this motion that we have been able to ascertain over the last couple of weeks, the Treasury advisers were called in and were begged for a solution, and a solution they gave. The members of the cabinet were told that the 2009-10 budget would need to include major cuts and new taxes, such as a fuel tax, perhaps cutting public sector costs, perhaps redundancies from the SES or raising more taxes in other forms. Worst of all, they were told very clearly that the next budget would need major surgery. They had to remove the debt cancer that was eating at the heart of the Queensland budget. Obviously that major surgery would have to include, amongst its options, \$15 billion of asset privatisations.

According to the Treasury advisers there was nothing that could be done—it had to be a major sale of assets.

Cabinet sweated on the decision. It knew that a raft of privatisations would be politically unpalatable to the Queensland community. It knew that Labor could not win an election with that kind of burden. Worst of all it kept it a secret. Cabinet members knew that it would not be found out for 30 years, by which time they would all have retired to the lobbying or the public speaking circuit. Sell on, the government cried to the Treasury boffins. Four months later on that date in February the Premier got on YouTube and announced that the GFC was going to wipe out Queensland and she had to have an election immediately.

What she did not say was that she did not want to publish the 2009-10 budget before the election. The Premier, Anna Bligh, hid her plans from the people of Queensland. She actually said to them, 'You can count on me. You can rely on me that I will actually create 100,000 jobs for 100,000 breadwinners'. Since the election we have seen major increases in registration, a fuel tax—all the things that Queenslanders are very aware of—increases in electricity charges and water costs that have gone up far more than the rate of inflation, and these are all plans that were part of the consideration. The Premier said to the people of Queensland at this difficult time, 'You can count on me', when clearly that was not to be the case. She did not take Queenslanders into her trust that privatisations were unavoidable as she is happy to claim now.

The question is why should the people of Queensland trust her? Now, of course, we have the member for Mount Coot-tha, the Treasurer, saying that we can trust him and his band of merry men as they claim that the only way, following their poor management, to give Queenslanders new schools and hospitals is to sell the assets that we currently engage in in this state. What he is doing is actually robbing the people of Queensland of assets and prosperity which they already own.

The Treasurer and the Premier are putting jobs at risk because this government had too much debt before the global financial crisis started. Queenslanders need to be made aware of the fact that ever since the Premier became Treasurer of Queensland on 2 February 2006 this government's forward debt has gone from \$22 billion to \$85 billion in barely six years.

Tonight the opposition, the LNP, on behalf of the people of Queensland are demanding to know the truth. We want to know what the government knew in October 2008. The people of Queensland demand to know the truth on this matter. When the Premier last week selectively read from that cabinet budget paper to say this is the thing that proves that we had no knowledge of what it was that we were planning, but then is not prepared to read from the whole paper that clearly adds to the element of mistrust that the people of Queensland feel. Normally those opposite claim that things in cabinet will not be revealed. Clearly that has been changed by this Premier selectively reading from this cabinet budget paper. Queenslanders demand to know the truth of the matter. Queenslanders are tired of the half truths, the mistruths and the no truths from this Premier.

When it comes to financial responsibilities today we saw the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport unable to answer questions about the A1GP. If a government cannot run a car race how can it run the budget in this state? Labor has shown its inability to manage the budget. I mentioned this morning in my private member's statement the lack of ministerial responsibility. It is exemplified by the Minister for Transport time after time when asked to answer questions about responsibilities within her portfolio and what she knew about privatisation matters. She is unable, unwilling and unprepared to answer the question for the people of Queensland via the parliament.

The people of Queensland are sick of the excuses. They are sick of the lack of accountability. The Labor Party has had information on its website that states that the assets being sold are less than one per cent of the total Queensland government assets. Information provided by the Treasurer, the member for Mount Coot-tha, says that \$15 billion is less than one per cent of \$200 billion. That is the sort of Treasurer that we have: someone who cannot give basic information and do mathematics that anyone in grade 5 can do. No wonder we are in the fiscal situation that we are currently in in this state when we have a Treasurer who is unable to do basic mathematics on an information sheet.

The government has also refused to reveal the proofs and other aspects of the myths and facts sheet that was also taken to cabinet saying that that was a cabinet-in-confidence document that would not be released. The people of Queensland need to have trust in the government of the day, they need to make sure that the people making decisions when they go to an election tell the truth about what it is they are going to do. The government cannot keep spending more money than it has. This government made out on the eve of the election that everything was going to be great.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: The Treasurer is carrying on in his particularly mature way as he is wont to do. It is very obvious that Queenslanders need a leader who will take responsibility for problems and deal with them; not misrepresent the situation on the eve of an election and then change commitments before the writs are even returned. For Queenslanders to think that this Premier went to an election and then said on the day after the election, 'Things are much worse than I thought they were', absolutely beggars belief. The

people of Queensland have lost trust in this government. We are determined to provide an alternative in terms of trust, integrity and accountability as opposed to a Premier who maintains they are accountable but clearly by her actions you shall know them. The people of Queensland know exactly the truth about this Premier and about this Labor government.